

County Line

News from the Government Offices of Lumpkin County, Georgia

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Time for Tax Bills

The Lumpkin County Tax Commissioner's Office will have mailed out 2005 ad valorem property tax bills by Oct. 20, and they will be due by Dec. 20.

The county office collects and distributes the taxes for unincorporated Lumpkin County, the city of Dahlonega and the Lumpkin County Board of Education, with the amount of taxes collected for each applicable entity clearly broken out on the bill. Taxpayers in unincorporated Lumpkin County will see a new line item on their tax bills this year. The amount listed as "water and sewer" is money being collected by the county to cover debt service on the Yahoola Creek Reservoir. Like their non-city neighbors, city of Dahlonega residents and businesses (and a few others outside the city limits but included in the city's water service delivery area) also will be taxed for the reservoir debt, but their portion will be collected as part of their city taxes, as listed on the tax bill.

SNAP Helps Pet Owners in Need

A new program having their dogs what the vet or community. Program offered Society, enables eligible dog and cat owners to get their pets "fixed" for only \$25 each, and that includes bringing the animals up to date on needed shots! Those most likely to benefit from the new program include senior citizens on fixed incomes, single-parent families, families whose heads of household are on active military duty, disabled citizens, families receiving assistance through such programs as WIC, Medicaid and PeachCare, and families experiencing temporary financial hardship. The program is a community-based effort made possible through PAWS memberships and donations, as well as through the generosity of local veterinarians David Ortin, DVM, Chestatee Animal Hospital; Mark Helvie, DVM, Dahlonega Veterinary Hospital; and Jane White, DVM, Murrayville Veterinary Clinic. To learn more about PAWS and the SNAP program or to request an application, call (706) 974-0723 or (706) 974-0710 (local calls from Lumpkin County).



New Rec Director at Home Here

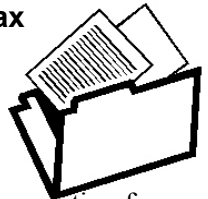
Rob Staples says serving in his new position as Director of Lumpkin County's Parks and Recreation Department feels like coming home. And well it should. He was athletic coordinator for the department from 1999-2002, living here while his wife Jennifer studied physical therapy at North Georgia College & State University. After three years as athletic supervisor



for the Statesboro/Bulloch County Parks and Recreation Department, the Statesboro-raised Staples, who earned a sports management degree at Georgia Southern University, decided to pull up stakes and return to Lumpkin County. Both the challenges and the opportunities that come with a growing community appeal to him, he says, and he loves the community. He says it will be a great place to raise his 13-month daughter Sarah and the son he and his wife are expecting in January. Welcome home, Rob!

Over 70? Apply for Tax Break

Lumpkin County voters in September approved an additional ad valorem tax break for senior citizens 70 years old and up. The new homestead exemption from school taxes is in the amount of \$120,000 of the assessed value of the eligible person's home. Eligible homeowners must file applications in the Lumpkin County Tax Assessor's Office between now and next March to receive the tax relief next year. For those with approved applications filed, the tax break will be reflected on 2006 tax bills, which will go out *next* October. To file an application, stop by the Tax Assessor's Office on 25 Short Street, Suite B in Dahlonega (in the first red brick building behind the Old Jail museum—make a quick left, then immediate right at the bottom of Courthouse Hill.) Proof of age will be required. For details, call 864-2433.



Gas Prices Challenge Meals on Wheels

As if it weren't already challenging enough to keep five *Meals on Wheels* routes staffed with volunteers five days each week, rising fuel costs are now forcing some volunteers to turn off their car engines and stay at home. Rhonda Bailey at the Lumpkin County Senior Center says the need for volunteers is greater now than ever before. *Meals on Wheels* provides home delivered meals every weekday to about 86 people in our community who in some cases might never get nutritious meals due to issues of aging, illness or disability. Holes in the volunteer schedule mean staff must hit the road, which takes them away from center activities. For as little as two hours and 40-50 miles worth of gas every week or two, you can make a big difference to the program and the people it serves. Even better, get your church or club to take on a route, as Lumpkin County AARP, Birch River Women's Club, the Kiwanis Club and Dahlonega Baptist Church have done. That spreads the time—and gas expense—over more people. Volunteers' gas costs are tax deductible, by the way. For details call Rhonda Bailey at 864-2358.



Caution: Road Work Ahead

Safety work on 102 miles of Lumpkin County Roads is now in full swing. That means motorists may encounter huge striping trucks, construction vehicles and other heavy equipment at work in the roadways, at intersections

and on bridges. Please remember: use extra caution and always yield to construction vehicles if you approach these work areas.



Lumpkin County . . . continued from reverse side

Teen Drivers, Parents: "I Had No Idea!"

Intentions were noble when legislators enacted tough new licensing provisions for drivers under 21 in the year 2000, then toughened the provisions for those under 18 the following year. The goal was to save lives. The problem is, the way Lumpkin County Probate Judge Michael Chastain sees it, the state never took steps to educate teens and parents about the severe penalties associated with the laws. "I had no idea!" is the typical, shocked response from teens and parents when they learn how easy it is for youthful drivers to have their licenses suspended or revoked, to have insurance policies jump 40-50 percent or be cancelled altogether, and to incur violations that could impact their employability and earning capacity for the rest of their lives. That's why Judge Chastain developed a handbook on Georgia's Teenage Driving Laws and teaches classes periodically at Lumpkin County High School. He hopes not only to help teens better understand the consequences of their actions but also to create safer drivers. Copies of the handbook are available at no charge at the Probate Office in the county courthouse.

Fighting Fire with— Volunteers!

The Lumpkin County Fire Department is always on the lookout for volunteer firefighters, especially in the Nimblewill and Mill Creek areas of the county to the south and west. If you're over 18 and want to learn about serving the community in this way, call 864-3030 or stop by Fire Station 1 at the intersection of Morrison Moore Parkway and Pinetree Way.

Every Day Is Veterans' Day for VA Committee

Members of the Lumpkin County Veterans Affairs Committee will place a wreath at the Veteran's Memorial Park on the county courthouse grounds at 11am on Veterans' Day, Nov. 11. The public is welcomed to attend. The committee's service to our veterans is an ongoing affair. Members recently arranged a ceremony at the Veterans Park, at which 90-year-old Lumpkin County resident Charles Floyd Suit received a long-awaited Purple Heart Medal. CPL Suit earned the medal as a result of combat injuries sustained in an aerial battle in 1943 and was accidentally overlooked all those years ago when the medals were awarded on a hospital ship en route to the United States.



The Veterans Memorial Park, featuring a series of granite "walls" bearing the names of Lumpkin County veterans (living and deceased) and active military personnel, continues to be a source of pride for the county. With the last of the park's initially installed monument slabs almost filled with names, the committee is now accepting donations to purchase and install an additional slab to bear more names. For information about making a donation or having a loved one's name added to the memorial wall, call Rachel Pruitt at (706) 864-3243 or Daniel Rhodes at (706) 265-9687.

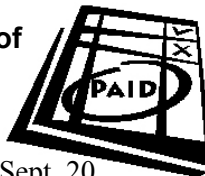
Field Goal for Public Works?

Lumpkin County's Public Works Department is hustling to reach its goal—to complete grading for new soccer fields at the Yahoola Creek Park Athletic Complex so they can be ready for play next Fall. Fill dirt for the project is coming from nearby higher ground in the park's new Softball Complex, where the department continues site work for a much-needed additional parking area. Once grading on the soccer fields is finished, irrigation lines will be run, allowing the fields to be seeded. Eventually, there will be two 360-foot-long regulation soccer fields and a smaller field for younger players in the park. Public Works Director Charles Trammel says his team is working to get at least one of the huge regulation fields turned over to the Parks and Recreation Department for seeding by Spring.



The Cost of Voting

Lumpkin County voters went



to the polls Sept. 20, deciding to continue a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) to benefit the school system and to adopt an additional homestead exemption providing some school tax relief for certain senior citizens. The direct cost of that election to the Lumpkin County government: more than \$15,000. With fewer than 1,500 people out of 12,716 registered voters participating, that's an average of more than \$10 per vote cast. Of those voting in the Special Election, only 137 took advantage of the state-required advance voting option. That's less than 10 people per advance voting day, at an averaged cost of more than \$18 per advance vote cast—just to staff the advance voting poll in the 6th grade gym!

In administering one of the most sacred rights of American citizenship—voting—local elections offices are limited by law as to how they can cut costs. Within those limits, the Lumpkin County Registrar and the Lumpkin County Board of Elections & Registrations continue to explore ways to save taxpayer dollars and make voting less of a financial burden on the county budget. Possibilities include combining or reducing the number of precincts (Lumpkin County has more than double the number most similar-sized counties have), moving the Elections & Registration Office out of the Courthouse so absentee and advance voting could be handled on site with existing staff (that could save nearly \$6,000 per primary and general elections), and using schools and other county buildings as polling places.



Just Call or Click!

If you have questions or concerns about your county government, answers or assistance are as close as your phone or computer. For contact information for county departments or commissioners, see Dept. and Contact Info., www.lumpkincounty.gov or call 864-3742.

County Commission

Steve Gooch, Chairman
Dr. John Raber, District 1
Deborah Hutcheson, District 2
Clarence Stowers, District 3
Marvin Martin, District 4

Stan Kelley
County Manager

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